

The Martian Landing That Never Happened

Did you know that on October 30, 1938, Martians landed in a field in a small town in New Jersey?

Although this event never really happened, about a million Americans thought it did. Here's why.

In the late 1930s, radio was a very important part of life for many Americans. Every day, people all over the country turned on their radios to hear their favorite shows. People listened to radio then the way we watch television today. There was a great variety of programs. Some of the shows were humorous and others were serious. Sometimes, radio stations presented plays that were written specially for radio.



H.G. Wells

One radio play was called *The War of the Worlds*. The plot was based on the book with the same title written by a famous science-fiction writer, H.G. Wells. In Wells' novel, Martians land on Earth and attempt to take over the world.

Orson Welles adapted the book into a radio play. Years later Welles became famous for making *Citizen Kane*, which many people think is the best movie ever made.

But in 1938 Welles was a young, unknown writer, and he wanted his radio play to be as exciting as possible. It certainly was! This is what happened.

On October 30, 1938, at 8:00 P.M., the CBS radio station presented Welles' play, *The War of the Worlds*. People all over the country listened to the program.



Orson Welles

The radio play began with an announcer pretending to read the day's news. A little later another announcer interrupted the news to deliver a "special report." The report said that Martians had just landed in a field in the small town of Grover's Mill, New Jersey.

The program then shifted to a "live news report" from Grover's Mill. The reporter at the site sounded very upset by what he was seeing.

"Good heavens!" he shouted. "Something's wriggling out of the shadows... There, I can see the thing's body. It's as large as a bear and it glistens... but that face... I can hardly force myself to keep looking at it!"

Reading Mini-Assessment Grade 5
LA.A.2.2.2 Author's Purpose Form A

A few seconds later the audience heard the sound of a microphone hitting the ground. Then there was silence.

The radio play continued. Actors, playing the parts of army and navy officers, described how the United States military was preparing to defend the country against the Martians. Other actors played the parts of government officials. They addressed the country, calling on the nation to be brave and to stand united against the enemy.

Of course, if you had been listening to the show from the beginning, you would have known that it was all just a radio play.

But millions of Americans had turned on their radios *after* the program had begun. Many of them believed that what they were hearing was real – that Martians had actually landed on Earth!

There was panic all over the country. Thousands of people called the radio station. They wanted to know if the world was coming to an end. Many people were too afraid to stay at home. They ran wildly into the streets. So many people tried to call relatives that phone lines shut down all across the United States.

Fear and panic made people act very strangely. One woman from Indiana, for example, ran through the streets shouting, "New York has been destroyed! It's the end of the world!"

In New Jersey many people in a large apartment building rushed outside with their faces covered with wet handkerchiefs. People hoped the handkerchiefs would act like gas masks to protect them in case the Martians launched gas attacks.

Some of the incidents were a little more humorous. A frightened man called his cousin who lived near Grover's Mill. "Are the Martians there?" he asked.

"No," his cousin replied. "But the Tuttles are here, and we're about to sit down to have dinner."

Fortunately, the panic didn't last very long. The radio drama lasted for an hour. When it was over, Orson Welles spoke to the audience. He stated that it was just a play, and nothing that people had heard was true.

He told the listeners, "Remember, please, for the next day or so, the terrible lesson you learned tonight. That grinning invader of your living room is an inhabitant of the pumpkin patch. And if your doorbell rings and there's no one there, that was no Martian – it's Halloween!"

Yes, it was October 30, and Welles was playing a little Halloween trick!

<p style="text-align: center;">Reading Mini-Assessment Grade 5 LA.A.2.2.2 Author's Purpose Form A</p>

Name _____ **Date** _____

Directions: Read the passage “The Martian Landing That Never Happened”, then circle the letter of the correct answer.

1. What was the author's purpose in writing this article?
 - A. to give readers facts about the day Martians landed in New Jersey
 - B. to tell readers a surprising true story about a radio play
 - C. to persuade readers that Martians might really exist
 - D. to explain that radio was more popular than television

2. Why does the author say, “That grinning invader of your living room is an inhabitant of the pumpkin patch.”?
 - A. to suggest that pumpkins will invade your home
 - B. to show that Orson Welles has played a Halloween trick
 - C. to make readers aware of the panic of a radio drama
 - D. to warn readers that Martians can come into your home

3. With which statement would the author of “The Martian Landing That Never Happened” MOST likely agree?
 - A. People in the 1930s should have spent less time listening to radio shows.
 - B. Orson Welles' play was too realistic to be aired on the radio.
 - C. A million Americans could not be wrong about the Martians landing.
 - D. It is important to hear the whole story before jumping to conclusions.

4. The author wants the reader to think that Orson Welles
 - A. was mean to play a trick on listeners.
 - B. wanted the play to sound realistic.
 - C. should never have made the radio play.
 - D. wrote a humorous radio play.

5. Why did the author quote the exact words that Orson Welles said to the audience at the end of the play?
 - A. to tell readers that the ending of the play never told listeners the truth
 - B. to teach readers a lesson about believing things you hear on the radio
 - C. to encourage readers to listen to the radio instead of watching TV
 - D. to show readers how listeners discovered the story was a Halloween trick

<p style="text-align: center;">Reading Mini-Assessment Grade 5 LA.A.2.2.2 Author's Purpose Form A</p>

Answer Key – The Martian Landing That Never Landed

LA.A.2.2.2: The student identifies the author's purpose as stated or implied in text (including recognizing when a text is intended primarily to persuade). The student also identifies ways an author's perspective influences text.

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